



Notes for the Shift Worker

Issue 3/2003

Sleep Quiz # 2

Are you running by life? Take this quiz to find out.

Circle your answer

1. You are behind a driver who hasn't noticed that the light has turned green. How do you respond?
 - (a) Give the person a moment to notice the light has changed
 - (b) Blow your horn immediately.
 - (c) Blow your horn and express your irritation verbally.
2. You are in a slow-moving grocery line with time to spare. What are you most likely to do?
 - (a) Engage in a conversation with someone else.
 - (b) Check down the line to see how fast things are moving.
 - (c) Become irritated.
3. In conversation with others, how often do you interrupt them in midsentence?
 - (a) Not very often.
 - (b) Some of the time.
 - (c) Very often.
4. How much time during the day do you devote to prayer, pondering, meditation and/or just taking it easy?
 - (a) At least an hour.
 - (b) At least 30 minutes.
 - (c) Less than 30 minutes.
5. Which word best describes your feeling at the end of most days?
 - (a) Contented.
 - (b) Fatigued.
 - (c) Stressed.

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Shiftwork and Quality Sleep

Circadian Technologies report that in a survey of 10,000 shiftworkers 45% report finding it difficult to obtain good quality sleep and 57% report going 18 to 27 hours without sleep in the past week. These figures are of concern given that laboratory studies have established that a person awake for 20-22 hours exhibits the same performance as someone with a blood alcohol level of 0.08 (Dawson et al 1997).

This level of impaired performance would not be tolerated in the workplace.

Circadian's Shiftwork Ranking 2002 survey shows that 82% of shiftworkers find it difficult to stay alert and perform their job safely.

64% of workers reported being very drowsy at work and making mistakes several times per shift, while 16% of employees reported having accidents or near misses several times per week.

Napping

In a study conducted by the National Centre for Scientific Research in France, some workers in an industrial plant were allowed for a year to determine the effects of a short nap on long-term quality of life and job satisfaction measures.

The group were allowed to use a napping room for one hour every night between 11:00 pm and 3:30 am. The results showed that vigilance increased after the nap and employees felt significantly better about their quality of life and the ease of working the night shift.

The research shows that short naps can significantly increase most of the human capabilities related to performance; vigilance, alertness, speed of response, memory, decision making, judgement and visual acuity.

Shiftwork and Ageing

Though it varies by individual, in general shiftwork becomes more difficult as a person ages.

Difficulty sleeping is the primary reason for this. With age it becomes harder to fall asleep, harder to stay asleep and harder to achieve the necessary amount of restorative deep sleep.

Sleeping during the daytime can be especially challenging when you reach your 40s and 50s.

In addition, as they age, people often have a harder time adjusting to rotating shift schedules.

Smoking and Reporting Pain

A study of nearly 13,000 people aged 16-24 found that smokers were 50% more likely to report pain that prevented them from performing work and leisure activities.

Sleep Quiz # 2

Are you running by life?

Continued

Circle your answer

6. When you see a rainbow, how long does it hold your attention?
- (a) Many minutes.
 - (b) Several seconds.
 - (c) Just a second.
7. When was the last time you paid serious attention to a child?
- (a) Today.
 - (b) Within the past few days.
 - (c) I can't remember.
8. How often do you feel joy in your work?
- (a) Frequently.
 - (b) Often enough.
 - (c) Are you kidding?
9. How often do you speed up one activity to get to the next?
- (a) Not often.
 - (b) Regularly.
 - (c) All the time.
10. How often do you hurry when there is no reason to?
- (a) Never.
 - (b) Sometimes.
 - (c) I have rushed through this test.

Kirk Jones, Ph.D. "Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down"

See results below.

Doctor's Hours

In Scotland it is now illegal for hospitals to make physicians work more than 56 hours per week or spend more than 72 hours on call. The British Medical Association warned that doctors made to work longer hours will now be able to take their employers to court for breach of contract. Understaffed hospitals worry that monetary penalties for working doctors too many hours could force them to lay off even more doctors, perpetuating the understaffing crisis. But officials have no sympathy, saying hospitals have known about the rules for over a decade. Officials say the new work hour limits will protect patients and prevent errors, such as an incident in which a teenager died at a Glasgow hospital after being left in the care of an inexperienced doctor working a 56-hour shift.

Effects of Low Level Environmental Noise in Extended Hour Operations

Many scientific studies have been conducted to assess the effects of low level environmental noise (less than 90dBA). Although not considered damaging to workers' hearing, low level noise produces physiological and psychological stress that adversely affects the health and performance of workers. The effects are made worse by increasing the noise level present in the environment or by increasing the length of exposure to the noise during work (Smith 1989). For that reason, the length of the workday, the consecutive number of days worked and the break pattern while at work are all key issues to consider when designing shift schedules that maximise the performance of workers, even in low-level noise environments (from 50dBA upwards).

Editor's Note: Setting 90dBA as the upper end of low levels is a US view.

Are You Sleeping on the Job?

Health Works have released some survey results for September 2003 of over 425 occupational health and safety and human resource staff on the above topic. Some important findings were:

38% of those surveyed have actually fallen asleep or taken a nap during working hours. 63% had less than 7-8 hours sleep the day before the survey.

78% have been at work and felt too tired to do any of their duties.

The major factors contributing to tiredness:

Anxiety and stress	24%
Staying up late	20%
Working long hours	19%
Irregular sleep patterns	19%
Caring for other family members	10%
Noisy environment	3%

For further information see www.healthworks.com.au.

Answers to Sleep Quiz 2

If you answered (a) most of the time, chances are you are not running by life, you are savouring it. Congratulations on your pace.

If you answered (b) or (c) most of the time, paying attention to your pace will be helpful. Review some of the (a) responses and begin practising one or two of them. Develop your own strategies.

Further copies of these notes can be obtained from MARCSTA (08) 9355 1400.

Various extracts from Circadian Technologies of the USA 24/7 Workforce Organisation monthly newsletter and quarterly Working Nights are made available with their permission.

